

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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The only UK magazine dedicated to vintage coin-operated amusement machines

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Hello again, and welcome to the June issue, which if all goes well, should reach you a little earlier in the month than usual (well, by recent standards at least). Sharron and I are going away for a short holiday, so I've pulled out all the stops to get this out before we go (if you end up receiving it at the end of the month, you'll know it didn't work)!

Anyway, I'm going to keep this brief, so that I have half a chance of getting to printers.

Till next time,

All the best

Jerry

Front Cover picture, *Gyles Brandreth and me during the BBC filming for the One Show.*

News and Coming Events

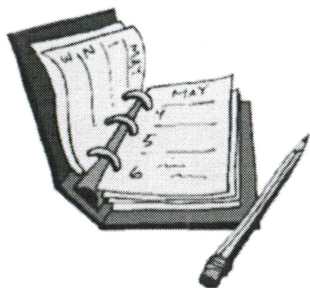
Mechanical Memories on the One Show

I announced last month that the BBC would be filming a short four-minute article for the One Show at my Mechanical Memories arcade in Brighton. The crew came down to Brighton at the end of May, fortunately choosing one of the few sunny days we had in the entire month! The film is specifically about mutoscopes, and is presented by Gyles Brandreth. At this point, I should like to thank a fellow collector who kindly loaned an original British cast iron mutoscope especially for the occasion, although I'm not sure how much of it will be seen in the actual film. I reckon I and my arcade got about a minute of filming, so by the time they've cut half of that, I'll be lucky if I get thirty seconds! Anyway, as yet I still don't know when it will be screened, but I am told it is likely to be sometime in July. When I have a firm date, I shall post details on my website, so keep an eye on the Announcements forum at:

www.mechanicalmemoriesmuseum.co.uk

Coventry '10

Following the auction last year, I provisionally set the date for this year's event as Sunday 28th November. Well, the date is now confirmed, so make a firm note in your diaries. There was some doubt as to whether or not we would be able to continue to use the same venue, but it looks like we're OK, for this year at least. Kevin will be back once again, allowing us the benefit of his considerable auctioneering skills, so we're all set and ready to go! All we need now are some entries. OK, you've got a few months to go yet, but please don't leave it to the last minute, as is usually the case. Start thinking about all those machines you might want to dispose of, so that you're ready to fill in the entry forms when they go out with the October magazine. Last year's event was our biggest yet – let's see if we can top it this year.



Dates for your diary

Carters Steam Fair 31st July – 30th August
Beach Lawns, Weston-Super-Mare

Great Dorset Steam Fair 1st – 5th September
Tarrant Hinton, Dorset

Jukebox Madness Show 25th & 26th September
Kempton Park racecourse

MMM Vintage Slot Collectors' Show & Auction 28th November
Coundon Social Club, Coventry

Bonhams Mechanical Music & Scientific Instruments Sale 7th December
Knowle

Don't forget – if you know of any event which would be of interest to readers of the magazine, please let me know so that I can include details in these pages.

Dreamland

MARGATE

Save Dreamland Update June 2010

As reported in the previous issue of Mechanical Memories, Carter's Steam Fair visited Dreamland for the entire Spring Bank Holiday weekend at the end of May. This was a first for Margate and a really important trial run at Dreamland even before site ownership has transferred and work commenced to bring the Dreamland site back to its former glory.

I have known Anna Carter, the owner of Carters Steam Fair, for about 10 years now, as she has supplied some fantastic books to my online fairground bookstore www.joylandbooks.com throughout its history. I had been discussing the possibility of Carters coming to Dreamland for over a year now, so it was great when she accepted our invitation and the booking was formalised. Dreamland Project Director, Jonathan Bryant and I met with Anna at the fantastic Pinkneys Green Fair last month and got a taster of what would be on offer over the Bank Holiday weekend.

At 3pm on the Monday before Bank Holiday weekend the first of the Carter's majestic vehicles rolled gracefully into Margate. Bob Preedy, Deamland's rides coordinator, and former Scenic Railway brakeman, Dave Collard, were on hand to assist with the set-up whilst the project design team have the opportunity to see, first hand, how these thrilling rides are expertly installed.

The event also featured James Messham's Wall of Death, which gathered interest in its own right. Touring for the first time with Carter's this year we were able to include the attraction, which tied in nicely with the Margate Meltdown - the London Ace Cafe's motorbike rally from the legendary Ace Café in London to Margate's seafront and harbour area to showcase their bikes and scooters and raise funds for British Legion Riders Branch.

The Steam Fair opened on a wet Saturday morning on 29th May and immediately brought Margate seafront back to life. The event was effectively a mini-preview for the amusement park of vintage rides that will open at Dreamland in 2012 and was a big success. And of course, Carter's wonderful vintage penny arcade was open, and I am pleased to report was packed for most of the weekend.

If this was a taste of things to come, then the signs are that there is a big appetite for what we are proposing at Dreamland. Anna told me that the Dreamland event was very much a success, with the park busy on all three days, even in poor weather. The Fair was pretty much running at capacity over the weekend, and if there was any doubt about the event's success, Carters have confirmed that they would like to come back and do it all again, but next time for longer.

I also spoke to some of the traders on the seafront about the Carters event at Dreamland, and they said that this was the best weekend they have had since Dreamland stopped operating as a permanent amusement park in 2002. This is real evidence of the importance of Dreamland to Margate as a resort. I am hopeful that with Dreamland reopened as the first amusement park of thrilling historic rides, that Margate seafront will be transformed.

And a little plug: Don't forget that the fantastic range of Carters books is available at the Joyland Books website, or by mail order. Details of how to order from Joyland Books is on the advert on the next page.

Carter's Steam Fair: Photographs of a Season with Britain's premier vintage funfair £5
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John Carter's Jubilee Steam Gallopers £7
Swings £4.50
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A Palace on Wheels £20

But it is back to business at Dreamland over the next few weeks as we hope to conclude the details of the transfer of land from the current landowners to enable us to start work on building the amusement park. More on that in the next issue of Mechanical Memories.

Nick Laister

Chairman, The Dreamland Trust

www.dreamlandmargate.com
www.savedreamland.co.uk

Editor's Note:

Nick took some great pictures over the bank holiday weekend – there's a preview on the centre pages, but of course they're in black and white. They can all be seen in colour in the 'Carters Gallery' on the Joyland website.

Thanks Nick.

NEW RELEASE:

Holiday Camps

by Kathryn Ferry

From the 1930s to the 1960s, millions of British people chose to spend their annual summer break at a holiday camp, taking advantage of the all-in package that included accommodation, food, and plentiful entertainment. The market leader was Billy Butlin whose camps operated on a vast scale, and offered a brightly coloured leisure land in contrast to the drabness of post-war rationing. The holiday camp story, however, goes back to the 1890s, and it continues into the present day with signs of a revival in camp fortunes. Kathryn Ferry celebrates the communal and the kitsch, glamorous grandmother competitions, chalets, Redcoats and all the other well-known symbols of an incredibly popular form of twentieth-century holiday.

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HOLIDAY CAMPS

KATHRYN FERRY

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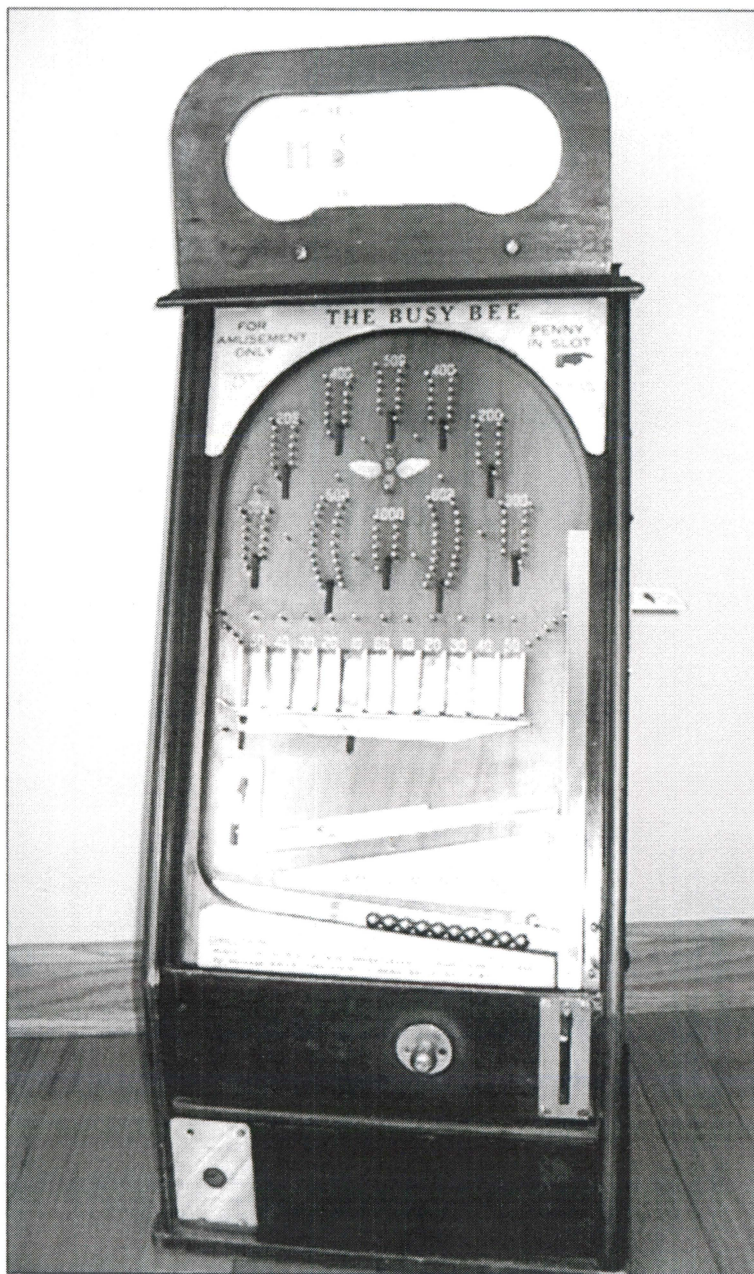
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Busy as a.....Housefly?

By John Peterson

I am occasionally asked, (other than by Dearly Beloved who seems unable to grasp the concept and therefore asks quite frequently) "Why do you collect?" And more specifically, "Why British coin-operated machines as opposed to American?" I have several stock answers that I trot out depending upon my mood and the gullibility of the questioner. To be truthful, the real answer has changed somewhat over time as my knowledge has expanded, to say nothing about the size of my collection. The first question is easily answered: "Because it pleases me." The second question requires a bit more thought.

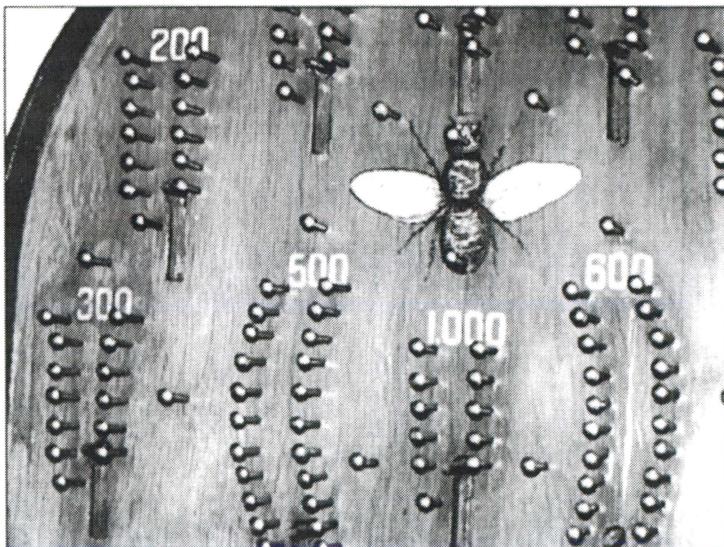
I live in the United States, home of the largest repository of slot machines, vendors, and just about any other type of coin-activated machine you care to mention. You name the game and if we didn't invent it, we perfected production and distribution of it after we copied the original. I have often thought that if truth in advertising applied to country identification, we would have to change our name to 'The United States of Mass Production.' We've now lost that title to China but from the turn of the 20th Century forward to mid-century, we were the Kings of Coin-op. Our slot machine industry alone cranked out tens of thousands of machines. Many, maybe a majority, were destroyed through anti-gambling zealotry and obsolescence but thousands have survived. If your interest is slot machines, you need to be playing in the American market if you wish to amass a top-notch collection. So, what's wrong with me? Why have I turned my back on the home team in favour of the visitors? In a word: whimsy!

Mass production, by definition, means the production of the same item in the same fashion to the same identical standard. Mass production leads to efficiency with the ultimate goal being lower cost. And as we all know, lower cost means the ability to sell at a lower price, which means *Walmart*! Mass production also means uniformity, or in my mind, 'sameness.' Which brings me to whimsy. I know the bible holds the high ground when defining sin but I have to tell you, it missed one of the biggies: being boring. In our family, we give you a lot of latitude in the behaviour department but there is one behaviour we will not tolerate: being boring. I can excuse a lot if I find your antics amusing. On the other hand, if you show no sense of humour or have an overwhelming preoccupation with your own 'specialness,' you risk my wrath. Life is too short to hang around with people who are bores.

All of which brings me to British coin-op. English games, whether skill or amusement, run strongly toward whimsy. 'Whimsy' is defined as "a fanciful or fantastic device, object or creation, especially in writing or art." Today's machine, **The Busy Bee** clearly illustrates my point.

The **Bee** is a game of amusement only. To verify, one need look no further than either the top or the bottom of the playfield where "For Amusement Only" is clearly proclaimed, twice! Shame on those of you who would use this simple game for gambling! And simple it is. Depositing a large British penny into the coin slot automatically releases the ten steel bearings onto the bottom row, as seen in the picture on page 10. Turning the knob on the front of the game operates the upside-down "U" shaped finger that feeds the balls, one at a time, into the launch position. The vertical lever on the front of the game is the spring-loaded launcher. The balls will either catch in the pin columns on the top of the playfield or drop down into the horizontal slots at the mid-field. Once all ten balls have been played, the score can be tallied and compared to the other gamblers...oops, I mean "players." Depressing the chrome lever on the right side of the cabinet releases the balls from their scoring positions and returns them to the bottom row, ready for another round.

The bee on the playfield is hand-drawn and coloured. Take a closer look at the picture below I am no apidologist but that insect looks more like a common housefly to me than any bee I ever saw. Before all you entomologists get out your text books and throw them at me, answer me this: If this does not look quite like a housefly, does it really look like a bee? I certainly think not! All of which brings me to what I find so engaging about British coin-op: the whimsical and sometimes absurd nature and quality of so many of their games. Many were literally hand made, one at a time. Besides the uniqueness this type of production lends to each piece, the reality that production runs will be small leads to more freedom for quirky concepts to squeak through. The question is less "what appeals to the masses?" and more "what pops my cork as the designer?" This difference in approach is subtle but important. Do you think Mills or Jennings would ever have seriously considered a slot machine designed to look like a fly?



I have no idea who manufactured **The Busy Bee** or when she started buzzing. I have seen several others offered for sale in Great Britain over the years. All were identical to mine although all were missing the topflash. My topflash, pictured below, is original to the machine even though, proportionally, I think it looks a bit too large. The sign inside the topflash is not original but is a design created by my son, Prince Sleeps-a-Lot.



Although I may never know the manufacturing genesis of the **Bee**, that does not mean I am completely without anecdotal reference. Scratched quite legibly into the wood on the side of the game, next to the coin slot is: "Eileen was here." Not to be outdone, "Brandy" and "Jim" carved in, together with others whose penmanship deteriorated to the point that someone felt compelled to inscribe "Write please" on the bottom of the wood sideboard with a quality knife. These graffiti signatures and suggestions only add to the charm of this most charming of games.

Whimsy? Thy name is mine. I will take a game that speaks to the frailties and foibles of Man over manufacturing prowess any day. Retired now from the Captain's seat, I am a fly-boy no longer. Nonetheless, I'm still busy as a bee, looking for that next honey of a game. I hope you are too. Good hunting!

John Peterson, USA

Post Script: When not driving Dearly Beloved crazy, John writes mystery/thriller novels. And chases British flights of fancy. If you wish, you may give him a buzz at: jp4@charter.net.

Carters at Dreamland





Top Gun Marshall

By Robert Rowland

In previous articles in this magazine, I have talked about the magical 1960s days in the local amusement arcades here in Mablethorpe. One very big attraction in those days was a life-sized cowboy shooting machine called **Top Gun Marshall**, standing over six feet tall, dressed all in black, including real tan leather cowboy boots. The figure itself was surrounded by a wooden fenced-off enclosure, this stopped the usual idiots from damaging the figure or trying to grab his hat.

On insertion of 6d, the cowboy would instruct the player what to do. You had to cock your gun, held in the holster at the front, and when the cowboy said "draw" you would quickly raise your gun and pull the trigger, aiming at the chest target area. At the same time, the cowboy's right hand, holding his gun, would be raised and he would fire a shot at you. The idea being, you hit him before he got you.

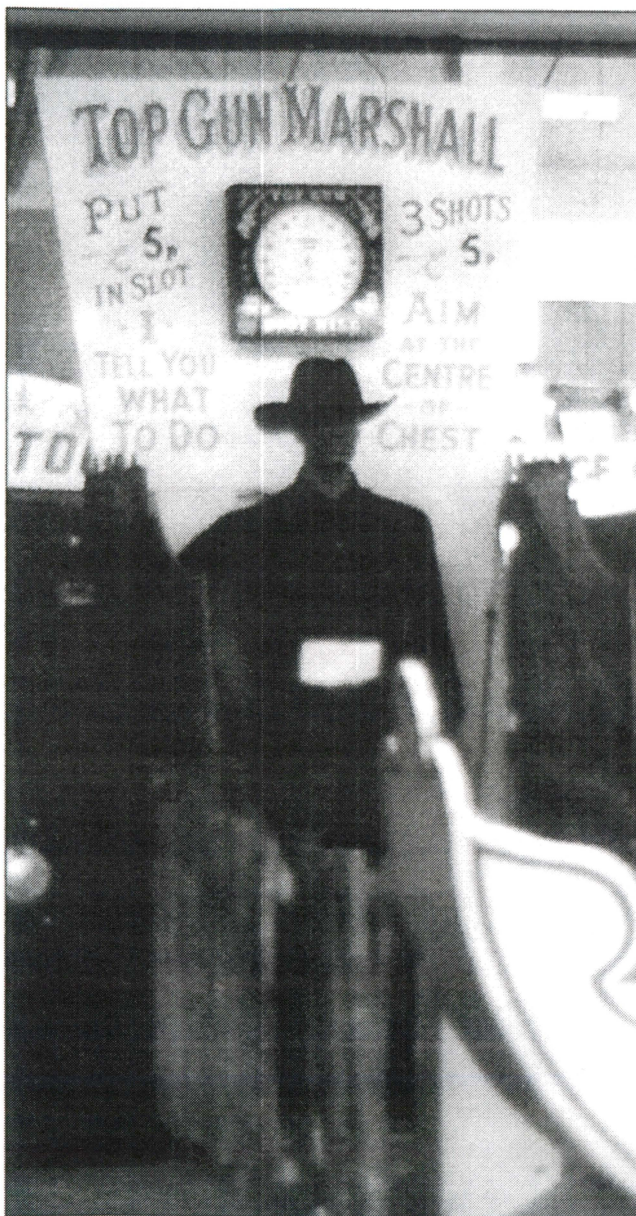
Top Gun Marshall worked on an LDR (light dependant resistor) which was sunk into a short tube in his chest. The gun which the player fired had a flash strobe light inside the barrel, activated by the trigger. Providing the aim was something like accurate, the LDR reacted to the light flash, thus determining the taped positive or negative response to the shot. There was a square box clock-type indicator at the top, which showed the speed of the bullet fired by the player (up to a max. 100 mph). If the cowboy was hit, his eyes would light-up red, and each hit or miss would result in various spoken comments, which were recorded on to an audio tape player. I heard these same responses every day for years and eventually knew them off by heart, even saying them in my sleep!

This machine attracted large crowds at the time and holidaymakers were hanging around waiting for the next player to insert 6d in the slot. On insertion of a coin, the cowboy would speak, and there were two opening options:

- 1) "I'm the marshall of this here town, and I'm gonna referee this shoot out. Remember to cock the gun when you draw."
- 2) "I'm top gun in these parts. You have to be fast to outdraw me. Remember to cock the gun when you draw."

Then the cowboy said, "ready, draw" and the shootout commenced. You got three shots for your 6d. A direct hit on the cowboy's chest area would result in his eyes lighting red and you would hear one of three positive responses:

- 1) "Ahh, you got me. I had a little dust in my eye."
- 2) "That was a lucky shot dude."
- 3) "Ooh I'm hit, my gun must have jammed. You gonna give me another round? Try again."



*The original 1960s Top Gun Marshall.
Picture taken in 1971 – just after decimalisation.*

If you were slow to raise your gun, or if you fired and missed, then you would hear one of three negative replies:

- 1) "Why, you ornery critter, I told you I was the fastest draw."
- 2) "You missed me, you sidewinder. Try again."
- 3) "Why, you greenhorn dude. You're not as fast as you thought you were, are you?"

These clips were random and didn't come in any strict order. After the player's third and final shot, the cowboy would always say, "Now you've had a little practice greenhorn, try again."

A friend of mine, who worked in the arcade for over twenty-five years, still has the original real tan leather cowboy boots, made in the USA by Stetson, which were rescued from the skip. He also has the original sound recordings on tape, which he recorded in 1969 one morning before the arcade opened. We hope to post these rare recordings on Youtube, but at this present time they are mislaid. If and when they get posted, Jerry will let you all know via MMM. Also, we are very lucky to have a decent picture of Top Gun Marshall, which was taken in 1971. Decimalisation had just arrived and they changed it to 5p a go (which was an old shilling), doubling the initial pre-decimal price.

This machine attracted some strange characters! Some would walk into the arcade dressed in their own cowboy outfits. They would stand in front of the Marshall, hands at their sides, limbering-up, their toy guns in their holsters (wouldn't be allowed today of course) – the real shootout cowboy stance; it was hilarious at the time. I remember seeing one player actually duck to the right when the cowboy fired, and he hit his head on the end wooden surround. He ended up flat out on the floor. Luckily, he made a full recovery, and was seen in the arcade the next day, playing again.

It was also damn funny when one day the machine went out of sync. The cowboy would be saying "ready, draw," while the arm was already on the way back down. Then, while he would be saying something like "aah, you got me, I had a little dust in my eye" the arm came back up again. He would be shouting "greenhorn", and saying "ready", there would be a pistol shot bang, the poor player was stood there bewildered, click, click, clicking the gun. Then he'd be putting the gun back in the holster, the cowboy would be shouting insults, another bang and the cowboy's arm would come up again. Biggest cock-up since Alfred burned the cakes!

Top Gun Marshall operated in the same arcade for just under twenty years. He was eventually replaced in the 1980s by a newer version called Gunslinger. In the years to come, Gunslinger never seemed to be as popular as its predecessor had been. Ten years later, and Gunslinger fired his last shot and ended up in the arcade skip. The arcade is still in operation today, and even now in 2010, regular older visitors to Mablethorpe can still recall those 1960s days when Top Gun Marshall stood proud in the centre of this particular amusement arcade. Gone, but certainly not forgotten.

Robert Rowland



Gunslinger, the 1980s successor to Top Gun Marshall.

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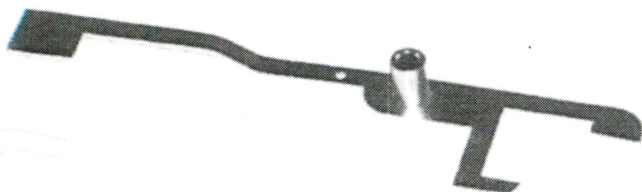
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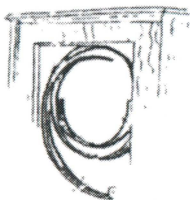
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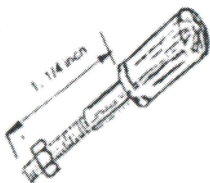
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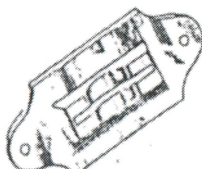
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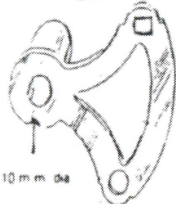
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sheet) £15.25

N02 Ball Gallery £12.55

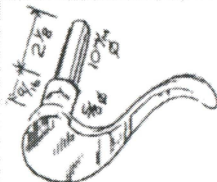
N03 Thumb Stop £6.25

N04 Coin Slot (2p)
£9.25

CHROMED TRIGGER
FRONT



10 mm dia



TRIGGER



CHROMED ARROWS
Reversible.

N05 Trigger Front £9.25

N06 Trigger £12.25

N07 Payout Arrow
£2.55

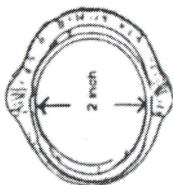
N08 Payout Bowl &
Surround £15.55

CHROMED PAYOUT BOWL

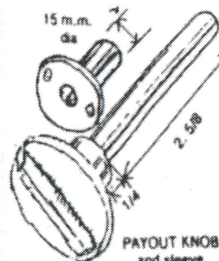


2.5 inch dia cup 2 x 0.25 inch fixing
squares at 3.75 inch centres

CHROMED KNOB SHIELD



2 x tapped M5 fixing holes on
extended nipples 2.1/2 centres.



PAYOUT KNOB
and sleeve

N09 Payout Knob
Shield £9.95

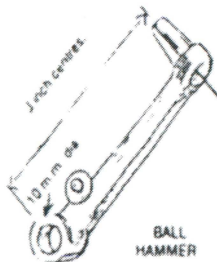
N10 Payout Knob &
Sleeve £11.95

N11 Ball Hammer £4.95

N12 Ball Cups
1-5 £9.99each
6-10 £7.99each
11+ £5.99each

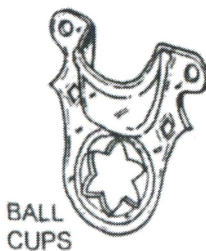
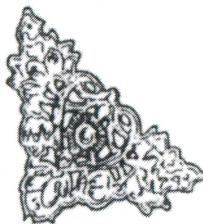
N13 Spandrells £14.99

N14 Allwin Track
Inner £19.00
middle £19.00
outer £23.50
set of 3 £47.00



BALL
HAMMER

SPANDRELLS



BALL
CUPS

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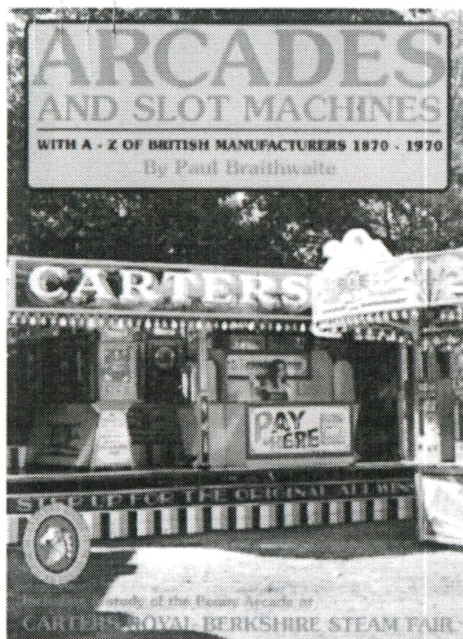
This volume captures Watling Manufacturing Company's full range from scales to bandits in catalogues, brochures, line folders, broadsides and service data, original patent and mock-up photos of the ROL-A-TOR line, artists' preparatory airbrush renderings for advertising and promotional material and Watling family photos and correspondence. Plenty of legendary anecdotes and well-informed context in the accompanying commentary. Hardback, 192 pages, b/w. **Price: £15**

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